





At the height of the insecurity problems, the site was operating at nearly four-times the planned capacity. Photo: ACTED

### Situation before the conflict

The target population had been living in a residential neighbourhood in Bangui (5th District), made up of a mix of religious groups.

A Bangui-wide survey was organised by an INGO in September and October 2013. This assessment showed that the average size of households had increased rapidly due to a massive inflow of people caused by the high level of insecurity outside Bangui. This increase in households' size was already causing stress on host families' livelihoods.

### Situation during the conflict

Following the violence in December 2013 in Bangui, around half a million people moved to makeshift sites within the capital. In some cases, people moved just a few hundred metres from their homes, taking refuge in buildings such as churches or schools.

Others fled to improvised IDP camps, often at a considerable distance from their homes. The ability of displaced people to return to their home communities was hampered by poor security, particularly at night. During the night people were more likely to be victims of armed robbery or abduction.

As reliable information on the security situation was very limited, many rumours circulated in the city, making the fear of violence just as important to those affected as the actual risk of an attack.

In the project area of the 5th District it appeared that most of the residents had fled during the beginning of the insecurity, though some remained. Most Muslims took refuge in the community of the 3rd district whereas others fled in large numbers to the IDP camp at M'Poko airport.

### Shelter strategy

In response to the huge displacement of people within Bangui, as well as in the provinces, the Shelter Cluster set the goal of ensuring that displaced populations were protected from the physical elements and could live in dignified conditions, without threats to their personal security. A two-fold strategy was developed:

- Distribution of NFI kits, including emergency shelter items such as tarpaulins. These were aimed mostly at populations in dispersed settlements; and
- Construction of community shelters, aimed at grouped settlements in the urban area of Bangui.

**The Mayor called the night shelter "Sanctuaire de l'espoir" (sanctuary of hope).**

### Project implementation

The project was a pilot project as part of a return strategy, and a livelihoods project ran in parallel in the district to try and help returnees re-establish themselves. The project was not replicated immediately due to security issues reducing access and a difficulty in finding other suitable sites.

The mayor of the 5th District made the original proposal to the main organisation to set up a night shelter for returning IDPs.

A disused women's training centre was identified as the site that would be converted into a communal night shelter site. The centre was made up of three buildings and a yard surrounded by a high wall on three sides, with a fence at the front. This protected area made it a good candidate for providing a secure compound.

The project was planned by the main organisation, while the structures were built by an international NGO as implementing partner. The project was part of a general programme of emergency shelter and water and sanitation. The main organisation provided funding for the day-to-day management, responsibility for which was handed over to a local NGO. The main organisation also provided funds for improved lighting.

To provide night shelter for a target population of 1,050 people, 31 communal shelters, 59 latrines and 15 showers were constructed inside the compound.

At the start of the project, the people who used the refuge came from neighbourhoods in the immediate vicinity. As tensions increased in Bangui, the profile of the night shelter population changed.

Each community shelter was named after the original neighbourhood area of the occupants, and people usually slept with their families and neighbours.

During the early stages of the project, an agreement was made with the international protection force that they would include the compound as part of their patrol, but remain outside of the compound. This was particularly important as

the INGO implementing partner was highly visible within the site. Once the site management was handed over to a local NGO, soldiers from the Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) were based inside the camp.

One case of gender-based violence was reported on the site. The victim was referred to the Protection Cluster for support, and lighting on the site was improved to reduce the risk of further incidents.

Security issues prevented the main organisation from visiting the site once management had been handed over to the local NGO, and it was not always possible to get clear reports from the site managers.

As the situation in the area becomes more secure, the centre will be able to resume its normal activities. Currently, the international implementing partner is providing maintenance of WASH infrastructure and has a budget for rehabilitating the site once the project is finished. One positive bonus of the project is that the site now has an improved electrical installation and better lighting, which will be of benefit when the site is rehabilitated.

### Beneficiary selection

There was no official selection process – all those who wanted to stay in the night shelter compound were accepted. However, the intended capacity of the site was exceeded during periods of heavy violence, leading to overcrowding and many beneficiaries sleeping outside on the ground, exposed to the elements.

### Coordination

Coordination with the military, both the French mission and MISCA, was an extremely important factor in the refuge being able to provide a secure shelter option.

Steps were taken, however, to emphasise the independent agenda of humanitarian organisations, even if weekly coordination meetings between international organisations, local authorities, and armed forces were necessary. Coordination meetings were organised away from the project area. The demarcation

The project has a plan for returning the site to its former use, including filling in drainage channels.  
Photo: ACTED



was less clear once the INGO left the project site.

Coordination with other humanitarian agencies was enhanced as the night shelter site provided a focal point for other agencies to conduct projects, for example, child protection. Attempts to secure extra funding for clean drinking water transportation failed, and this unfortunately meant that potable water was not always available.

### Design and materials

Plastic sheeting and toilet slabs were supplied by the donor; timber was locally sourced.

Although the shelter design allowed for partitioning the shelters with internal curtains, this was not implemented.

Separate male and female shower and latrine areas ensured privacy for the users.

### Wider project impacts

Increased security at night, with people's personal security guaranteed and the ability to bring in portable valuables, minimised the human and

economic cost of the conflict in the area, since people could return to their neighbourhoods during the day.

Surveys in IDP sites showed that the proximity of a night dwelling site to their daytime activity area was a key factor in the selection of a night shelter, including spontaneous sites. Secure sites that were suggested to IDPs but were located far away from their neighbourhoods, were rejected.

Later attempts to identify additional transitional night shelters, such as the one described in this case project, failed for different reasons, including a lack of government approval, or lack of security.

The deployment of the European Union Force (EUFOR) in the 3rd District of Bangui, and the development of a stabilisation strategy, means that the experience gained through this pilot project will be useful for developing future return strategies.

Night shelters need to be accompanied by support for rebuilding economic activities if they are to work as part of a return strategy, as economic recovery has been identified as the second most important factor (after security) in deciding whether to return.

**"The protection of the population is improved and we can reach people with other projects such as hygiene promotion."**  
Local partner